

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 SAB-01 SAM-01 IO-14 ACDA-19

OMB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 AID-20

SAJ-01 SCCT-02 DRC-01 /177 W
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R 161225Z AUG 74

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1250

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 1694

NO FOREIGN DISSEM

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINR, MARR, EG, IS, SY

SUBJECT: MIDDLE EAST MILITARY POSTURES

REF: STATE 177005

1. BELOW ARE SOME THOUGHTS AND COMMENTS ON THE MIDDLE
EAST MILITARY POSTURE ASSESSMENT SUBMITTED IN REFTEL.

2. SUSPECTING THAT IT WILL BE OBLIGED TO GIVE UP MORE
TERRITORY THROUGH THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS AT GENEVA;
SUSPICIOUS OF USG INTENTIONS IN THIS REGARD; CONCERNED
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ABOUT GROWING US-ARAB RAPPROCHEMENT NOT ONLY WITH EGYPT

BUT WITH SYRIA AS WELL; ENDEAVORING TO GET MORE USG ASSISTANCE THROUGH PRESSURE ON THE U.S. CONGRESS AND U.S. PUBLIC OPINION; DEMONSTRATING TO ISRAELI PUBLIC THAT IDF IS ON TOP OF SITUATION; ATTEMPTING TO DIVIDE SYRIA FROM EGYPT BY EMPHASIZING POSSIBILITY OF AGREEMENT WITH EGYPT BUT NOT WITH SYRIA, ISRAEL MAY CURRENTLY BE ATTEMPTING TO CREATE A WAR PSYCHOSIS IN MIDDLE EAST IN THE HOPE THAT ARABS AND PARTICULARLY SYRIANS WILL MAKE SOME FALSE STEP. SUCH A STEP WOULD THEN ENABLE ISRAEL TO ADMINISTER TO SYRIA LESSON DENIED ISRAEL IN OCTOBER AS WELL AS TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR ISRAEL TO DEMONSTRATE TO USG THAT ARABS AND PARTICULARLY SYRIANS CANNOT BE TRUSTED AND THEREFORE ISRAEL SHOULD NOT BE EXPECTED TO MAKE FURTHER MAJOR TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS TO SYRIA AND PERHAPS TO JORDAN AND EGYPT AS WELL.

3. MEANWHILE, OVER THE LAST SIX MONTHS SYRIA HAS APPARENTLY BEEN THE RECIPIENT OF SIGNIFICANT SUPPLIES OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT FROM THE SOVIET UNION. THIS RESUPPLY COMES ABOUT BECAUSE (A) SYRIA NEEDED TO REPLENISH ITS ARSENAL FOLLOWING BOTH THE OCTOBER WAR AND THE GOLAN WAR OF ATTRIBUTION AND (B) SYRIA NO DOUBT ALSO TOOK ADVANTAGE OF SOVIET COURTING OF SYRIA FOLLOWING RECENT DOWNSWING IN EGYPT-SOVIET RELATIONS TO GET AS MUCH AS IT COULD. NONETHELESS BASED ON MY CONTACTS, PARTICULARLY WITH NEWLY NAMED CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL SHIHABI OVER LAST FOUR WEEKS OR SO, THERE HAS BEEN NO INDICATION THAT SYRIA IS PREPARING FOR A WAR DURING NEXT FEW MONTHS WITH ISRAEL WHICH SYRIA REALIZES STILL REMAINS MUCH STRONGER ON THE GROUND AND IN THE AIR. MOREOVER AS HEAD OF A MINORITY REGIME IT IS MY OPINION THAT ASAD HAS NO INTENTION OF ENGAGING IN ADVENTURES AND THIS HAAJ BEEN TRUE FROM THE TIME HE TOOK CONTROL OF SYRIA FOLLOWING THE COLLAPSE OF THE SYRIAN CAPER DURING THE JORDAN CIVIL WAR IN 1970. TO POSIT SYRIAN PREPARATIONS FOR WAR AGAINST ISRAEL OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS, THEREFORE, SEEMS TO GO AGAINST EVERYTHING THAT ASAD HAS BEEN DOING OVER THE LAST FOUR YEARS. MOREOVER, GIVEN SYRIA'S CURRENT BAD RELATIONS WITH IRAQ, ITS UNCERTAIN RELATIONS WITH EGYPT AND ITS UN-RELIABLE CONNECTION WITH JORDAN, IT WOULD SEEM TO ME THAT ASAD WOULD BE MAD TO CONTEMPLATE TAKING ON THE ISRAELIS ALONE PARTICULARLY WHEN HE WOULD NOT HAVE THE ELEMENT OF

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SURPRISE. AT THE SAME TIME THE SYRIAN PEOPLE APPARENTLY ALSO WANT PEACE AND HAVE BEEN SUPPORTING ASAD'S POLICY OF A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT. THUS, ALL INDICATIONS OVER THE LAST THREE OR FOUR MONTHS POINT TO SYRIAN REGIME'S DESIRE FOR SETTLEMENT OF THE ARAB-ISRAEL QUESTION AND PARTICULARLY OF THE MATTER OF THE GOLAN THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS RATHER THAN WAR. THIS TOO HAS BEEN EMPHASIZED TO ME BY GENERAL SHIHABI. IT IS TRUE THAT THE SYRIANS HAVE BEEN CONCERNED ABOUT ISRAELI

STATEMENTS THAT THE REMAINDER OF THE GOLAN WILL CONTINUE UNDER ISRAELI CONTROL BUT I BELIEVE THEY ARE COUNTING ON THEIR NEW AMERICAN OPTION WHICH IN MY OPINION THEY APPARENTLY HOPE TO USE TO THEIR BEST ADVANTAGE. GENERAL SHIHABI'S APPOINTMENT AS CHIEF OF STAFF POINTS IN THIS DIRECTION AND HE HAS IN EFFECT TOLD ME AS MUCH IN OUR VARIOUS CONVERSATIONS OVER THE LAST COUPLE OF MONTHS.

4. I AGREE THAT THE PROBLEM IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT SYRIAN AND ISRAELI WAR PREPARATIONS COULD ESCALATE TO THE POINT WHERE THEY BECOME SELF-FULFILLING. I THINK, HOWEVER, THE SYRIANS ARE GOING TO TRY TO PLAY IT COOL. IN THIS REGARD, THUSFAR THE SYRIAN MEDIA HAVE BEEN KEPT ON AN EXTREMELY

SHORT LEASH--THERE HAD BEEN NO REACTION TO THE ISRAELI WAR TALK (WHICH HAS BEEN GOING ON NOW FOR ALMOST A MONTH) UNTIL A COUPLE OF DAYS AGO. EVEN THIS RECENT STATEMENT WAS ONE WHICH IN EFFECT SAID SYRIA IS READY TO DEFEND ITSELF RATHER THAN MAKING EMPTY THREATS WHICH USED TO BE THE CASE WITH SYRIAN STATEMENTS IN THE PAST. (HERE AGAIN GENERAL SHIHABI TOLD ME A COUPLE OF MONTHS AGO THAT THE SYRIANS HAD LEARNED THEIR LESSON AND THAT THIS GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT INDULGE IN WORDMONGERING AS HAD BEEN DONE BY SYRIA IN THE DAYS AND WEEKS BEFORE THE BREAKOUT OF THE JUNE WAR.)

5. CONCERNING ISRAELI RETALIATION ON LEBANON BECAUSE OF PALESTINIAN TERRORISM, I THINK THE SYRIANS WOULD AGAIN TRY TO LIMIT THEMSELVES TO VERBAL SUPPORT AS LONG AS POSSIBLE. IF ISRAEL, HOWEVER, MOUNTED A MAJOR CLEANUP CAMPAIGN AND STAYED IN SOUTHERN LEBANON FOR A PERIOD OF TIME BEYOND A FEW DAYS, THEN I THINK THE SITUATION WOULD CHANGE.

6. FINALLY, BASED ON REPORTS WE ARE GETTING HERE THE
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EGYPTIANS ARE ALSO WORRIED THAT THE SYRIANS MIGHT "TAKE THE ISRAELI BAIT CURRENTLY BEING OFFERED THEM" THUS GIVING THE ISRAELIS AN EXCUSE TO MOUNT AN ATTACK ON SYRIA WHICH WOULD DRAW IN EGYPT AS WELL. AS I SAID ABOVE, HOWEVER, SYRIANS SEEM TO BE AWARE OF THIS ALLEGED ISRAELI GAME-PLAN AND AS OF NOW AT LEAST APPEAR TO BE MAKING EVERY EFFORT NOT TO LET THIS HAPPEN.
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